

§ 1.557

38 CFR Ch. I (7–1–16 Edition)

could reasonably be expected to pose an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual;

(ii) There is an urgency to inform the public concerning actual or alleged Federal government activity, if the request is made by a person primarily engaged in disseminating information;

(iii) In the discretion of the FOIA Officer, the request warrants such treatment; or

(iv) There is widespread and exceptional interest in which possible questions exist about the government's integrity which affect public confidence.

(2) A requester who is seeking expedited processing must submit a statement, certified to be true to the best of the requester's knowledge and belief, providing a detailed basis for how there is a compelling need. VA may waive the requirement for certification of the statement of compelling need as a matter of administrative discretion.

(3) Within ten (10) calendar days of its receipt of a request for expedited processing, the FOIA Officer shall determine whether to grant the request and will provide the requester written notice of the decision. If the FOIA Officer grants a request for expedited processing, the FOIA Officer shall give the request priority and process it as soon as practicable. If the FOIA Officer denies the request for expedited processing, the requester may appeal the denial, which appeal shall be addressed expeditiously.

[76 FR 51894, Aug. 19, 2011]

§ 1.557 Responses to requests.

(a) *Acknowledgement of requests.* When a request for records is received by a component designated to receive requests, the component's FOIA Officer will assign a request number for future reference and send the requester a written acknowledgement of receipt.

(b) *Processing of requests.* Upon receipt of a perfected request by the appropriate component, the FOIA Officer will make a reasonable effort to search for records responsive to the request. The FOIA Officer ordinarily will include as responsive those records in its possession and control as of the date the search for responsive records began. This includes searching for records in electronic form or format,

unless to do so would interfere significantly with the agency's automated information systems. If fees for processing the request are due under § 1.561, the FOIA Officer shall inform the requester of the amount of the fee as provided in § 1.554(e) and § 1.561. When a request is granted in part, the FOIA Officer shall mark, redact, or annotate the records to be released to show the amount of information deleted and, where technically feasible, indicate the exemption at the place of redaction unless doing so would harm an interest protected by an applicable exemption. The FOIA Officer will provide the records in the form or format sought by the requester, if readily reproducible in that form or format.

(c) *Time limits for processing requests.* Ordinarily, a component will have twenty (20) business days from the date of VA's receipt of the request to make a determination whether to grant the request in its entirety, grant the request in part, or deny the request in its entirety. If the request must be referred to another component, the response time will begin on the date that the request was received by the appropriate component, but in any event not later than ten (10) business days after the referring office receives the FOIA request.

(d) *Adverse determinations of requests.* Whenever a component makes an adverse determination denying the request in any respect, the component FOIA Officer shall promptly notify the requester of the adverse determination in writing. Adverse determinations include the following: A determination to withhold a requested record in whole or in part; a determination that the requested record does not exist or cannot be located; a determination that a record is not readily reproducible in the form or format sought by the requester; a determination that what has been sought is not a record subject to the FOIA; a determination on any disputed fee matter, including the denial of a fee waiver; and a denial of a request for expedited treatment. The adverse determination notice must be signed by the component head or the component's FOIA Officer, and will include the following:

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 1.558

(1) The name and title or position of the person responsible for the adverse determination;

(2) A brief statement of the reason(s) for the denial, including any FOIA exemptions applied by the FOIA Officer in denying the request;

(3) The amount of information withheld in number of pages or other reasonable form of estimation; an estimate is not necessary if the volume is indicated on redacted pages disclosed in part or if providing an estimate would harm an interest provided by an applicable exemption; and

(4) Notice that the requester may appeal the adverse determination and a description of the requirements for an appeal under § 1.559 of this part.

[76 FR 51894, Aug. 19, 2011]

§ 1.558 Business information.

(a) *General.* Business information received by VA from a submitter will be considered under the FOIA pursuant to this section and in accordance with the requirements set forth in § 1.557 of this part.

(b) *Designation of business information.* The submitter of business information may designate that specific records or portions of records submitted are business information, at the time of submission or within a reasonable time thereafter. The submitter must use good faith efforts in designating records that the submitter claims could be expected to cause substantial competitive harm and thus warrant protection under Exemption 4 of the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(4). The submitter may mark the record submission as confidential or use the words “business information” or describe the specific records that contain business information. Such designation will be considered, but will not control, the FOIA Officer’s decision on disclosing the material. A designation will remain in effect for a period of not more than 10 years after receipt by VA, unless the submitter provides acceptable justification for a longer period. The submitter may designate a shorter period by including an expiration date.

(c) *Notices to submitters.* (1) The FOIA Officer shall promptly notify the submitter in writing of a FOIA request seeking the submitter’s business infor-

mation whenever the FOIA Officer has reason to believe that the information may be protected under FOIA Exemption 4, 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(4), regarding business information. The written notice will provide the submitter an opportunity to object to disclosure of any specified portion of the records within the reasonable time period specified in the notice. The notice will either describe in detail the business information requested (*e.g.*, an entire contract identified by a unique number) or shall provide copies of the requested record(s) or record portions containing the business information. When notification of a voluminous number of submitters is required, the FOIA Officer may notify the submitters by posting or publishing the notice in a place reasonably likely to accomplish notification.

(2) If the FOIA Officer determines to release business information over the objection(s) of the submitter, the FOIA Officer will notify the submitter pursuant to paragraph (e) of this section.

(3) Whenever the FOIA Officer notifies the requester of a final decision, the FOIA Officer will also notify the submitter by separate correspondence. This notification may be contained in VA’s FOIA decision.

(4) Exceptions to this notice provision are contained in paragraph (f) of this section.

(d) *Opportunity to object to disclosure.* When notification to a submitter is made pursuant to paragraph (c)(1) of this section, the submitter may object to the disclosure of any specified portion(s) of the record(s). The submitter’s objection(s) must be in writing, addressed to the FOIA Officer, and must be received by the reasonable date specified in the FOIA Officer’s notice in order for VA to consider such objections. If the submitter has any objection to disclosure of the record(s) requested, or any specified portion(s) thereof, the submitter must identify the specific record(s) or portion(s) of records for which objection(s) are made. The objection will specify in detail all grounds for withholding any record(s) or portion(s) of the record(s) upon which disclosure is opposed under any exemption of the FOIA. In particular, if the submitter is asserting